

Tobacco & Older Persons



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- Of the over 416,000 smoking-related deaths annually in the U.S., over 94% are to persons aged 50 and over; over 70% are to persons aged 65 and over.
- One in three smokers die prematurely in the U.S., losing an average of 12 to 15 years of life versus normal life expectancy – thereby eliminating retirement years for most of these people. Smokers' continuing to smoke despite these odds is sometimes called "Smoker's Russian Roulette."
- Nationally about 13% of persons aged 65 and over are smokers -- over 4 million persons nationally -- while about 26% of persons aged 50 to 64 are smokers -- about 9 million people nationally. Thus, over 13 million Americans aged 50 and over are currently smokers. These 13 million smokers aged 50 and over account for about 27% of all adult smokers in the U.S.
- Today's generation of older Americans – those persons born between 1900 and 1948 who are now aged 50 and over – had smoking rates among the highest of any U.S. generation. In the mid-1960s, about 54% of adult males smoked and another 21% were former smokers; over 34% of adult females were smokers with 8% being former smokers. Today's epidemic of smoking-related deaths is the result of these high smoking rates.
- Of the approximately 3 million pipe smokers in the U.S., over half are over the age of 46.
- All the major causes of death among the elderly are associated with smoking or Environmental Tobacco Smoke -- cancer, heart disease, and stroke. Each of these diseases generally is associated with months and years of disabling pain and suffering.
- Tobacco-related fires caused almost 1,400 deaths in 1995. Of these, over 700 occurred to persons aged 50 and over (over 50%), and almost 440 of these deaths were to persons aged 65 and over (over 30%). Smoking is the number one cause of fires that kill older persons.
- Of cases of oral and throat cancer in the U.S., 95% occur in persons aged 40 and over; the average age at diagnosis is 60 years. Smoking, particularly when combined with heavy alcohol consumption, is the primary risk factor for approximately 75% of oral cancers in the U.S. In 1998, about 30,000 Americans will be diagnosed with oral and throat cancer; about 8,000 deaths will result, of which 5,200 will be men and 2,800 women.
- Recent research has indicated that smoking use is related to a number of other health problems/diseases that are generally associated with aging, including hearing loss, dementia, and Alzheimer's.
- Research has shown that stopping smoking results in improvement in health status at any age, including in those persons aged 65 and over. Some health benefits are almost immediate, and the longer people refrain from smoking, the more their health improves.